

Tape #56
Interview with Woody Derby portraits / Stuart Hedley
Date: 8/28/08
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Checked by

Tape #N56

00:24

<<Woody Derby portraits>>

05:11

<<conversation>>

06:29

CD: Well Stuart thank you so much for coming out today. We appreciate you sharing your story.

SH: Thank you for inviting me.

CD: Our pleasure. Now that we put all this gear on you and around you. We are going to ask you to ignore it all. Ignore the camera. You and I are just going to have a conversation.

SH: Okay, sure.

06:50

CD: So if we can start just with uh we're going to have everything here transcribed written out, and uh, make sure they spell your name correctly. If you could say and spell your name for the microphone that would be great.

07:03

SH: Okay, my name is Stuart Hedley. And it's spelled S-T-U-A-R-T H-E-D-L-E-Y.

07:18

CD: Very good thank you.

07:32

CD: Stuart if you could introduce yourself, and tell us where you come from originally.

07:37

SD: In uh in 1921, October 29th I was born on a yacht in West Palm Beach,

Florida. It was my uncle's yacht, he had three of them and my dad was uh in the service at that time in Pensacola, Florida. Teaching pilots to fly he had been in during World War One and uh we were there I guess for about two and a half years before we left and come up to New York state and uh we came up on one of the yachts and my mother had left my dad and me and I was in the care of my grand mother, she raised me with a hairbrush and a bible. **(08:41)** and uh so I grew up around Lake Ontario around boats, 'cause my uncle Ken had the Fuselade and the Comodore, and they were lake excursion boats they had. But, then I also grew up around speedboats and canoes, so I was destined to be a sailor, as it turned out. When my grandmother passed away in 1931, why I went to live with my dad and my step-mother, and we lived in Williamsville, New York. And I was going to high school there, and Congressman Bider, who was a friend of my father's, told him, he said, 'if Stuart will stay in school and keep his grades up, I'll make a recommendation for the Naval Academy for him.' Well, it so happened that we had to move, and we moved out of his district, so that was a done deal, as far as Annapolis for me. So we moved to Orchard Park, New York, which is outside of Buffalo, it's like a bedroom. And we were there, and in 1939, I had a fight with my step-mother, and I lost interest in everything. I went from an honor roll student of 90 and above to a total failure in 3 months. So I told my dad I gotta get out of the house. He says, 'well, what do you want to do?' 'I want to join the Navy.' Well, he agreed, so he took me down to the recruiting office, and they sat me down and gave me my battery of tests, and I was all done by 11 o'clock, and I passed with flying colors. So they told me to go out and get a bite to eat and come back after lunch and I'd have my physical. Well the doctor took one look at me, he says, 'son, we can't take you. You're way too small.' I was 4 foot 11 in high school, senior in high school, and I only weighed 112 pounds.

11:25

I: Stu, I'm sorry, I've got to stop you, we got some noise.

Pause

12:58

I: So you went to the recruiting office, and what did the doctor at the physical say?

SH: He told me, he says, 'son we can't take you, you're too small.' And he said, 'you're only 4 foot 11 and you weigh 112 pounds, and we need men to be at least 5 foot 2 and weigh 120.' So I asked him, 'is there somebody I could talk to? Speak to?' He says, 'well, talk to the Chief. The recruiting chief.' So I talked to him, and he told me, he says, 'I'll let you talk to the Commander.' So I went in and I talked to the Commander, and I told him my case, what had happened. So he told me, he said, 'Roosevelt has just started a new organization, known as the Civilian Conservation Corps. Called the CCCs.' And he said, 'what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna write a letter to whom it may concern that we're sending you there to build yourself up.' Because I told him I wanted to get out of the house and away from my step-mother. So, that's what they did, they put me in the CCCs. Well, the day I got there, I stood along side of my locker and I put a pencil mark. And

every 30 days, I'd go stand by that locker and put a pencil mark. But during the period that I was there, why they put me out in the woods chopping down trees, and meals were on time, regular, had to go to bed at 10 o'clock. And so, pretty soon, I started to grow. And by the...I think it was about March or April of '40 that I was 5 foot 2 and I weighed 122 pounds. So I went to the Navy recruiting down in Buffalo, and they took me just like that. I was given a 10 day relief where I could get everything in order, and then I was shipped to Newport, Rhode Island, where I went through basic training. And when I got through with basic training in October of 1940, I was sent to Long Beach, California to be assigned to the USS West Virginia battleship.

15:35

I: Stuart I have to...sorry for the delays-

Pause

15:59

I: So I think where we left off is, tell us how and when you got stationed to the West Virginia.

SH: Well, like I said, I was shipped to Long Beach, California and assigned to the USS West Virginia BB48. And amazing thing that is really remarkable, I went aboard on my birthday, October 29, 1940. And so, now I wasn't dry behind the ears yet, and due to the fact that I grew up around boats, I knew they always had steering wheels, and so I wanted to see the steering wheel of this big battleship. And I got away from the group, and I made my way to the pilot house, and I'm looking all around the pilot house, and the officer on the watch says, 'what's your name, son?' I says, 'Stuary Hedley, why?' He says, 'they've been calling your name for the past 5, 10 minutes to fall in to quarters, down on the quarterdeck.' I says, 'where's the steering wheel?' He says, 'you're looking at it.' What was, like a streetcar controller, and 2 weeks later I'm gonna be on that streetcar controller as a helmsman. Well, I went down to the quarterdeck, fell in, they called me a ham, so he told me, he says, 'you're being assigned to the 3rd division.' Well the 3rd division compartment is on the starboard side of the ship, and Ensign Harris was starting to designate where our battlestation was gonna be, and he told us, 'I want all you men to assemble inside the gun chamber, and then I'm gonna assign you to your different jobs.' Well, I was assigned to gun pointer, and the whole idea was that I would raise that gun up and down for trajectory, for firing distance. **(18:12)** But the training was to get the dials to match up so that the arrows would be pointing right at one another at the time of firing, meaning you were right on the target. And my buddy Croslin, he was assigned trainer, he was the one who moved the gun out in an arc away from the ship. And so, there's a gun captain, a primer, a rammer, the shell men that handle the shells coming up from the shell deck, and the group that handles the powder bags. So, all told, there's probably about 20 of us inside of a turret for one gun, now we have 2 guns to a turret, and these are 16 inch guns. The shell stands about 5 foot 2, it weighs 2700 pounds, it takes 5 100 pounds of black powder to fire that shell 30 miles. And so, consequently, my first

experience of firing was off Long Beach, and when you're down in the pit and that gun goes off, it's like thunder in the distance, and so you get accustomed to the firing, and the idea was to to see how fast they could fire and load and fire, and I think they got it down to where it was around 30, 45 seconds between load and firing. **(20:05)** So, we left Long Beach on January the 3rd. We thought we were going to the East Coast, but at the last minute our orders were changed, and we were to go to Hawaii. Well, we were about 500 miles off the coast when we started hearing that Hawaiian music, and that was music to my ears. Well, we got our there, and, an amazing thing, because the Chief in our division told us, he says, 'now while we're out here in Pearl, we're going to be at sea most of the time.' So he says, 'you guys get used to that now, because the order is that there's only gonna be one battle fleet in Pearl at a time. Maximum of 4 battleships.' And he said, '2 battle fleets will be operating at sea, and we'll break up, and then we'll go into Pearl. The object will be rest and recreation and upkeep.' So, we had a Executive Officer that everybody onboard ship hated, BR Alexander, and it was August of '41 that orders came for Alexander to be transferred to the North Atlantic Fleet, and we got a new Executive Officer, Richard *Hellincotter*. Well, it was shortly after that, that Captain *Markland* was relieved, and Captain *Benyon* came aboard. The morale of our ship went from about 15% to about 68, 70% in about 3 months, so that gives you an idea of what kind of people they were. **(22:22)** Well, we operated like that, right up until Thursday before the attack. And we were ordered into Pearl, and when we came in, we saw the Arizona, we saw the Tennessee, we saw the Maryland, and we saw the California. Well, the Oklahoma came in, the Utah came in, Pennsylvania was in dry dock, and the Nevada came in. And we look around, we thought this is odd, you know, 9 battleships in port. And the whole idea was that we were going to have an annual military inspection, and we were to open up all the compartments, spaces and everything, and they said we were going to have a military inspection on Monday. But what most people don't know is that on November the 26th, the Japanese left the *Carroll* Islands headed for the Hawaiian Islands, on that very same day, taking into consideration the international date line, word came from the White House to both Kimmel and Short, prepare for sabotage. When they looked that up, it means bring in everything you got so you can keep a close watch on it, and that's why all the battleships were in, all the planes were lined up on the ground, wingtip to wingtip, at Wheeler Field, at Kaneohe Naval Air Station, Ford Island, Hewitt Field, and there was one more, I can't remember what it was, but anyhow. Everything was set up, and there were 96 vessels in port on that day, and when the Japanese came in- And another strange thing was that, I think it was about 7:45, so, or 7:55 I guess it was, we had a brand new piece of equipment known as a radar, and 2 men that were on that radar reported a large fleet of aircraft approaching the island. Well, the officer in charge, and we had him at our meeting not too long ago, said forget about it, we've got some B17s coming in from Stateside, the only thing was they made the error that those planes were not coming from the east, they were coming from the north, that's where the Japanese were coming from, but they never took that into consideration. But when I speak on Pearl Harbor at the Veterans' Museum, we have a beautiful memorial, painting, on the wall, and the question I ask is, 'who fired the first shot of WWII?' They says, 'well the Japanese

when they-' No. 6:30 in the morning a tugboat sighted a periscope going through restricted waters, reported it to the Ward, and the Ward fired their 3-inch, and it went right through the conning tower of that sub. And I had his funeral not too long ago, the fellow that, Don Morgan, that fired that first shot. So, and they wired, or radioed I guess it was, but it didn't get through, because had it gotten through, we would have had at least 30 to 45 minutes to prepare for the attack. Well, in my particular case, I got up at 5 o'clock that morning, Sunday morning, my girlfriend's mother was going to meet me on the dock, and we were gonna go on a picnic up on the north end of the island, we had been out roller skating Saturday night. And so, I was all excited, and I was getting my roller skates oiled and cleaned up and everything, because we were going to go roller skating that night, and so when I got ready, my dress shoes were missing, so I asked one of the fellas, I says, 'hey, did you see my dress shoes?

Interviewer coughs.

END OF TAPE